

RANKING MEMBER YVETTE D. CLARKE OPENING STATEMENT

Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, & Security Technologies

“The EMP Threat: Examining the Consequences”

September 12, 2012 – 10 am

Thank you Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing on our efforts to assess the EMP threat. I too, also want to welcome our colleague, Mr. Franks to the Subcommittee. He has helped write the roadmap for addressing the EMP threat, and I am glad he is here to discuss his bill.

I also want to welcome our other witnesses today, and especially Dr. Beck, who formerly was the staff director for this Subcommittee and is an expert on this matter. Welcome back Chris. I look forward to all the testimony.

I believe it is important that we find the building blocks for a partnership that will bring improvements to the security and reliability of one of our most important critical infrastructures, the electric grid.

This hearing will help give this topic the visibility it deserves. We all know the grid plays a fundamental role in our lives, our economy, and way of life. We simply cannot afford to lose broad sections of the grid for days, or weeks.

It is our very reliance on this infrastructure that makes it important to anticipate the worst, and there are many scenarios that we should be concerned about.

We are still learning about the significant threat that could come in the form of a natural or manmade Electromagnetic Pulse, and we have more to learn about the effects of an EMP and geomagnetic disturbances to the grid as well.

Over the past few years, I have followed with interest Secure Grid exercises that The National Defense University has held at Fort McNair. These series of tabletop exercises on U.S. electrical grid security have focused on the effects of a major geomagnetic storm on the nation’s electrical infrastructure.

With the 12-year peak in solar activity approaching in 2012-2013, there is considerable upturn in interest from government agencies, including the White House and Congress, in understanding the potential impacts if a severe geomagnetic disturbance event should occur.

Although this is a low-probability event, the consequences of an extended and widespread power loss across portions of the country would constitute a serious national emergency.

To me, one of the largest barriers to government agency disaster response is cross-agency coordination and roles of authority – crucial elements made more difficult when discussing the privately owned national electrical grid.

Ultimately, the Secure Grid exercises and other policy discussions work to identify preparedness gaps in plans to manage the challenges associated with extended power outages, and add urgency to existing efforts to identify technology solutions to protect the U.S. grid.

Hearings such as this serve to highlight areas where the U.S. and its Allies are analyzing the risks that a severe geomagnetic disturbance would present, and help us look for international approaches to effectively react to these risks.

While severe solar storms that create geomagnetic disturbances cannot be prevented, there are tools and opportunities to mitigate and protect the grid from the risks of such an event.

My colleagues on the Homeland Security Committee and I have spent nearly three years identifying and reviewing the security protections that are in place to mitigate the effects of any intentional or unintentional attack on the electric system. Our goal is to determine whether appropriate protections are in place that would mitigate catastrophic incidents on the grid.

Our review has required extensive discussions and review with the private sector, which owns, operates, and secures the grid. The private sector develops its own security standards and also oversees compliance with these standards. In short, the private sector has the responsibility for securing the grid from electromagnetic events and cyber attacks.

I am very pleased to see the statement for the record submitted by the North American Reliability Corporation. These are the folks who are closest to the electric grid, and they manage an almost impossibly complex flow of energy, not to just our 330 plus million people, but also the flow of energy across our borders...every day.

Finally, the U.S. Congress has also acted. In June of 2010, the GRID Act passed the House of Representatives unanimously. Unfortunately, it stalled in the Senate and did not become law.

The bill would have granted the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission expanded authorities to oversee electromagnetic and cyber protections.

This Congress, Mr. Franks has introduced a version of the bill, now called the SHIELD Act, which is similar to the GRID Act but focuses only on the electromagnetic threat component without the cybersecurity component.

I am a co-sponsor of that bill, and it is our hope that during the next Congress we will get the bill through both Houses and to the President's desk.